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ABSTRACT

As public schools collaborate with the Head Start and child care communities to improve the quality of early childhood education and care, practitioners working with young children need guidance and support in implementing best practices in early learning. This manual provides guidance to teachers engaged in improving their programs in concert with using the Maryland-developed Standards for Implementing Quality Early Learning Programs for self-appraisal or validation. The manual provides brief descriptions of practices in early learning programs based on research and current literature. The descriptions are aligned with each of the Standards' indicators and include references to relevant literature for further study. Following introductory remarks, the remainder of the manual presents the standards in the areas of: (1) program administration (mission statement, personnel, program continuity, and program accountability); (2) program operation (environment, curriculum, instruction, and assessment); and (3) home-school-community partnership. (Contains 13 references.) (KB)

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MANUAL OF BEST PRACTICES TO IMPLEMENT QUALITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

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Introduction

The *Standards for Implementing Quality Early Learning Programs* are designed to improve the quality of early learning programs in Maryland's public schools. As public schools are collaborating with the Head Start and child care communities to improve the quality of early childhood education and early care, the practitioners working with young children need guidance and support for implementing best practices in early learning.

This *Manual of Best Practices to Implement Quality Early Learning Programs* will provide guidance to teachers who are engaged in the improvement of their programs as a result of using the *Standards* for self-appraisal or validation purposes. The *Manual* provides brief descriptions of practices in early learning programs based on research and current literature. The descriptions are aligned with each of the *Standards'* indicators. In addition, references to relevant literature are included for further study.

It is suggested that the Supervisors of Early Learning use this *Manual* for staff development purposes in conjunction with the self-appraisal and validation process of their school system's early learning programs. For instance, all Extended Elementary Education Programs (EEEP) prekindergarten programs are required to conduct a self-appraisal every three years. Supervisors of Early Learning Programs can facilitate this process by using this *Manual* in conjunction with the *Standards* to assist self-appraisal teams in evaluating their program, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing improvement strategies.

Many thanks go to MSDE staff who helped to review and recommend revisions to this document [They are Sally Walsh, Project Director for English Standards; James Tucker, Jr., Section Chief and Specialist in the Arts; Marcie Taylor-Thoma, Specialist in Social Studies; Mary Etta Reedy, Specialist in Physical/Health Education; Gary Heath, Section Chief and Specialist in Environmental Education; Donna Crabbe-Watts, Facilitator in Mathematics; Rhona Fisher, Director of Reconstituted/Challenge Schools; Linda Shevitz, Senior Educational Equity Specialist; and Marcy Emberger, Staff Development Specialist].

The Maryland State Department of Education will update the *Manual* annually. For more information, please contact MSDE's Early Learning Section at (410) 767-0335.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Mission Statement

1.1 The mission and philosophy statement for an early learning program is adopted by the school's early learning personnel and is stated in the school improvement plan. It supports the local school system's overall mission and system goals. The written mission and philosophy statement for the early learning program is used by the staff as the foundation for planning, staff development, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the program.

1.1.1 Planning	*1.1.3 Staff Development*	*1.1.3 Implementation*	*1.1.4 Evaluation*
The early learning program mission statement reflects planned implementation of effective early childhood practices.	**The School Improvement Plan describes an ongoing staff development program so that opportunities for professional growth and development are ensured.**	**The mission statement addresses implementation of developmentally appropriate practices, including family and community involvement.**	**The School Improvement Plan includes a process for ongoing documentation of annual evaluation.**
The mission statement is an integral part of the local school system's overall mission. It refers to research- and literature-based practices in early childhood education. The major concepts are consistent with the "Mission and Philosophy for the Early Learning Years" and "Early Learning Program Goals" as outlined in *Laying the Foundation for School Success: Recommendations for Improving Early Learning Programs* (1992). The school's improvement plan includes goals, objectives, and strategies related to prekindergarten and kindergarten programs.	The school improvement plan reflects staff development opportunities for teachers in early learning (i.e., prekindergarten and kindergarten) programs that are coordinated with the school system's professional development initiatives, which in turn reflect the standards and strategies included in the *Recommendations of Strategic Directions for Professional Development in Maryland's Public Schools 1996-2000*, developed by the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education.	The mission statement reflects the principles of developmentally appropriate practices as outlined in the revised edition of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC)'s *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Practice in Early Childhood Programs* and the International Reading Association (IRA)/NAEYC's *Literacy Position Statement*. It states explicitly the role of parents and of the family in the early education and learning of young children and reflects the multiple social and cultural contexts of the community.	The school improvement plan reflects methods of program evaluation, which include contributions from teachers, administrators, early childhood specialists, and parents. The documentation includes information about the nature and extent of changes in student learning as indicated on a report card, developmental checklist, and/or portfolio. Standardized tests are administered on only a sample of students for the purpose of program accountability. Any standardized test that is administered to a child is valid and reliable in terms of the child's background characteristics and the intended purposes of the test.

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PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Program Personnel **1.2 The early learning program is collaboratively administered, supervised, and implemented by qualified early childhood personnel**			
1.2.1 Administration **The supervisor and administrator communicate about the early learning program to ensure the implementation of a developmentally appropriate program.** The supervisor of early learning programs informs the principal at each school about the practices that should be evident in the developmentally appropriate program by providing resource materials such as state and local school system recommendations and guidelines, information brochures for parents, and staff development materials on developmentally appropriate practices.	*1.2.2 Supervision* **The administrator and/or supervisor provide feedback to the staff about the implementation of a developmentally appropriate program.** The supervisor or principal provides feedback to program staff about specific instructional or programmatic strategies related to developmentally appropriate practices through a variety of supervisory methods such as clinical supervision, peer coaching, mentoring for improvement, workshop conferences and seminars, and action research in teaching teams.	*1.2.3 Implementation (Prekindergarten)* **Each classroom is staffed daily by a teacher who meets Maryland state certification requirements in early childhood education and a full-time permanent assistant who has a high school diploma or equivalent. When the teacher or assistant is absent, a certified (when possible) teacher substitute and/or qualified assistant is provided.** N/A	*1.2.4 Implementation (Kindergarten)* **Each classroom is staffed daily by a teacher who meets Maryland state certification requirements for kindergarten. Any paid assistant who works in the kindergarten classroom has a high school diploma or equivalent and experience in working with young children.** N/A

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Program Continuity **1.3 The school utilizes curricula and instructional strategies which ensure continuity of learning for all students.**		
1.3.1 Curricula **The school utilizes curricula which are based on a developmental continuum for all children.** The school's program organization reflects a developmental and academic continuum from prekindergarten through the primary grades. It is based on the developmental characteristics and needs of young learners and helps them to reach high standards. The curricula are aligned with state standards for all content areas, they reflect diversity and multicultural content, and they are applied consistently and completely across grade levels. The school facilitates articulation among teachers at the time of the students' transition from one grade to the next. Students who are not meeting curricular expectations will either receive intervention services through the Early Identification and Intervention Program and/or continued support from well-qualified staff (e.g., tutors or health or pupil services professionals). Specific strategies are identified and used to involve families in their children's learning both inside and outside of school.	*1.3.2 Instructional Strategies* **The school bases instructional strategies on a developmental continuum for all children.** The school uses instructional approaches from prekindergarten through the primary grades which reinforce the diverse modes of learning among young children. Teachers select engaging materials, provide stimulating learning environments, and organize instruction that appeals to a range of learning styles, providing positive reinforcement or gentle guidance. Manipulatives are used in all content areas, with a strong emphasis on contextualized skill development and daily opportunities for language development, problem solving, and artistic expression.	*1.3.3 Articulation and Continuity* **School staff provides continuity of learning for all children through articulation of curricula, instructional strategies, and assessment across grade levels.** The school's organizational practices include the implementation of curricula that are continuous and sequential from prekindergarten through primary grades, consistent application of instructional practices across grade levels as reinforced in joint staff development programs, and use of an assessment protocol which allows primary grade teachers to review the assessment information on children from prekindergarten and/or kindergarten programs.

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PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Program Accountability **1.4 The school improvement team uses the results or the ongoing evaluation of the early learning program in planning for overall school improvement.**	
1.4.1 Reporting **The results of the self-appraisal or program review are reported to the local supervisor and the school improvement team.** After conducting a self-appraisal or program validation using the *Standards for Implementing Quality Early Learning Programs* instrument, the self-appraisal team reports the results of the program evaluation and the strategies for program improvement to the supervisor for early learning programs and to the school improvement team.	*1.4.2 Future Planning* **The results of the self-appraisal or program review are used to develop school improvement plans.** As part of the required school improvement planning process, the school improvement team reviews the results of the early learning program self-appraisal and program improvement strategies in order to incorporate them into the school improvement plan' s goals, objectives, strategies, and activities.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Environment **2.1 A planned and well-structured learning environment promotes active learning and full participation for each child.**			
2.1.1 Safety **The learning environment is free of objects and materials that are harmful.** The classrooms are located in a clean, safe, clutter-free, well-lighted, and well-ventilated area. The bathroom facilities are clean, free of lead-based paint, and well lighted. Cleaning materials are stored in locked cabinets. Playgrounds are free of broken glass and hazardous materials and are maintained appropriately.	*2.1.2 Safety* **Materials and furnishings meet standards of safety, size, durability, toxicity, and construction.** Furniture in the classrooms is in good repair and appropriate in size for children. Toilets and sinks are easily accessible to children. Materials and objects in the learning environment are clean, in good condition, and designed for use in group settings.	*2.1.3 Sanitation* **Surfaces and materials are cleaned regularly with antibacterial solution.** N/A	*2.1.4 Space* **The learning environment is planned for flexibility and children's movement. Space allows children to work large groups, in small groups, and independently.** Children's self-directed learning is facilitated by the use of learning centers for activities in such areas as dramatic play (not limited to housekeeping), blocks (specifically a full classroom set of unit blocks, hollow blocks, and a wooden set of vehicles), art (with a specific emphasis on the visual and performance arts), literature (reading-listening, library, and writing areas), sand/water and manipulatives (reinforcing science, math, and social studies concepts), and music. The art center is close to a sink, and the carpeted block and dramatic play centers are next to each other for interrelated activities. The space is arranged to provide clear boundaries for centers and unobstructed movement from center to center. Children can engage in activities of their own choice without distracting or being distracted by others. Noisy areas are separated from quiet areas. Props and materials not in use are stored in labeled storage boxes and cupboards away from children. The teacher's desk and file cabinet is separate from the learning environment. Any commercial bulletin boards function primarily to create a "print environment." Overall, the room reflects the children's current experiences and is well organized. Appropriate physical accommodations are made for children with disabilities.

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PROGRAM OPERATION

Environment **2.1 A planned and well-structured learning environment promotes active learning and the full participation of each child.**				
2.1.5 Multicultural Education/ Diversity **The learning environment is planned to reflect ongoing multicultural education.**	*2.1.6 Multicultural Education/Diversity* **The learning environment accommodates children with diverse learning needs and styles, those with disabilities, and those who speak other languages.**	*2.1.7 Materials* **Materials in the learning environment are used to foster all aspects of the child's development.**	*2.1.8 Materials* **Materials are designed to promote experiences for the child that facilitate integrated learning.**	*2.1.9 Furnishings* **The learning environment is arranged with furnishings that facilitate the organized storage of materials and that allow children access to, involvement with, and choice of materials.**
The learning environment includes images of all the children and their family members. It represents varied backgrounds through visual images that reflect diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Books and materials present accurate and positive images of and information about people from all groups living their daily lives. Print displays include non-English languages or Braille (as applicable). Music reflects a variety of cultural styles. Art materials include skin-tone crayons, paper, and paint. Dolls and figures represent a fair balance of gender and of heritage (African-American, Latino, Asian-Pacific, Native American, and European-Caucasian). The learning environment is organized so that all children, including those with disabilities, can function in it with a minimum of adult direction, and it is large enough for children to move without disturbing each other.		See: Learning Centers Materials and Supplies Checklist The materials can be used flexibly and for a variety of purposes. They encourage problem solving and creative thinking. They relate to the curricular themes and enable children to explore concepts related to the theme, to reconstruct the teacher-directed learning activity, to repeat experiences, to demonstrate what they know, and to experiment with new ways of thinking. Manipulatives are used to reinforce concepts in all content areas. Sets of materials of different sizes are hung or stored so that size differences are apparent. There are enough materials in each area for all children to work with them simultaneously. There are authentic objects in each area.		The learning environment has sufficient shelf space for the materials. Materials are accessible and organized by learning center. Tables and chairs are incorporated into center areas. Furnishings of the learning centers are placed along the walls of the room, providing open space for large group activities. The furnishings include individual storage and coat space. Tubs, trays, baskets, and other containers holding materials are clearly labeled.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Curriculum **2.2 Each local school system has a Board-approved curriculum that supports each child's development.**		
2.2.1 Content Integration **The content of the curriculum is integrated and appropriate for the age and individual development of each child, including meaningful concepts and processes.** The content of the curriculum is appropriate for the developmental characteristics of young children and their mode of learning. The curriculum is interdisciplinary, providing both discipline-based and discipline-integrated experiences through themes, projects, and other activities so that children develop an understanding of concepts and make connections across disciplines. Content integrates all curricular elements, including, for example, meaningful contexts for knowledge acquisition, processes to practice emergent skills, dispositions such as initiative, resourcefulness, cooperation, and persistence, as well as attitudes of self-confidence and competence.	*2.2.2 Goals and Learning Outcomes* **The curriculum goals are integrated and appropriate for the age and individual development of each child as measured by the learning outcomes for language development, cognition and general knowledge, physical development, and social and emotional development.** The curriculum is aligned with the state standards, i.e., Maryland Learning Outcomes and the Primary Assessment Outcomes and Indicators ("Readiness Outcomes").	*2.2.3 Language Arts: Reading* **The language arts program is primarily based on the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing with daily opportunities to interact with concepts, books, and print. Reading is developmental and based on an integrated approach.** The language arts program includes reading aloud to children from books that reflect cultural diversity. Classroom instruction focuses on concepts of print, vocabulary development, alphabetic principles, linguistic awareness, and phonemic awareness. Teachers apply concepts of kinesthetic modality through the use of letter shapes to build phoneme/grapheme correspondence. For kindergarten-age children repeated readings, concept of word, and letter naming are stressed. Daily learning opportunities such as listening to and reading stories and poems, seeing classroom charts and other print in use, and participating in dramatic play are reinforced. The program fosters emergence of reading through shared and guided reading as well as daily opportunities for children to read by themselves.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Curriculum **2.2 Each local school system has a Board-approved curriculum that supports each child's development.**		
2.2.4 Language Arts: Writing **The language arts program is primarily based on the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with daily opportunities to interact with concepts, books, and print. Writing is developmental and based on a process approach.** The writing component of the language arts program includes drawings, scribbles, stages of labeling, and dictating stories. Teachers focus on word awareness and have frequent conferences with children. In kindergarten classrooms, a writing center providing materials such as letter templates, letter-sorting boxes, writing instruments, and a computer is available to children. Journal writing is encouraged for free and creative writing, especially in response to readings (e.g., stories or poems) or to experiences.	*2.2.5 Mathematics* **The mathematics program is based on the exploration and development of mathematical concepts with the use of manipulatives. Learning experiences incorporate problem solving in real life situations.** The mathematics program includes counting, matching, comparing, and estimating numbers and their relationship to objects. It includes measuring, ordering, sequencing, and creating patterns. For kindergarten age children, it also includes basic math operations and statistics in the form of collection, organization, and display of data. Math concepts are presented through the use of manipulatives (e.g., abacus, cuisinaire rods, patterns, or counting blocks) and large unit blocks. Math concepts are introduced sequentially.	*2.2.6 Science* **The science program provides opportunities for children to engage in the processes of predicting, investigating, gathering data, drawing conclusions, and making generalizations as they learn about their environment, others, and themselves.** The science program emphasizes observation and exploration of characteristics of living things and their environments (e.g., through observing plants and animals or posing investigative questions about how organisms live), exploration of properties of the children's immediate physical world (e.g., through describing objects in terms of the materials they are made of and their physical properties; through using tinker toys or Lego's to represent objects of the physical world), exploration of earth, water, air, and sky (e.g., through investigating earth features such as rivers, streams, hills, fossils, or rocks); or the interpretation and explanation of information generated by the exploration of scientific phenomena (e.g., predicting, gathering data, or drawing conclusions).

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PROGRAM OPERATION

Curriculum
2.2 Each local school system has a Board-approved curriculum that supports each child's development.

2.2.7 Social Studies

The social studies program provides opportunities for children to engage in the processes of predicting, drawing conclusions, and making generalizations as they learn about their environment, others, and themselves.

The social studies program provides opportunities for children to engage in processes of predicting, drawing conclusions, and making generalizations as they learn about their community, their environment, and themselves. The program allows children to learn about themselves and the unique characteristics of their school and community as they construct maps, identify goods and services, examine needs and concerns, and describe transportation and communication. It also examines the contributions of various ethnic, racial, or religious groups through the use of fiction and non-fiction to foster the values of appreciation of diversity and respect for both differences and similarities among people. Children practice citizenship skills as they work with others in groups to achieve common goals and to make and change rules which promote order and fairness in a variety of situations.

2.2.8 Fine Arts

The fine arts program includes treatment of both the visual and the performing arts. The program provides opportunities for children to create, perform, and respond to quality arts experiences that are adapted to their developmental levels and that reflect their own culture.

The fine arts program introduces children to works of art—including performances, exhibitions, and literature of the highest quality—that are developmentally appropriate in content and presentation. The program recognizes the child's active role in learning and offers opportunities for children to construct and extend meaning communicated through language and other expressive modes such as the integration of words and gestures into dramatic play; painting, sculpting, and constructing; signing and playing musical instruments; and movement and dancing. Meaningful arts activities emphasize the process of learning and are not solely dependent on finished products. They build upon curricular goals and the sequential skills of each of the artistic disciplines, and they make interdisciplinary connections with learning across subject areas. The program fosters imagination, originates in children's play, and engages children actively in creating, reflecting upon, and presenting their own art in child-friendly environments and settings.

2.2.9 Health Education

Health education provides students with basic health information and services as well as with opportunities to demonstrate appropriate self-help and personal hygiene skills.

The health program emphasizes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for students to make health-promoting decisions and reduce their involvement in risky health behaviors. It stresses the ability to identify appropriate and responsible health choices and personal health needs. Children learn to locate resources that provide health information at home or in the community; to identify common household products that are harmful when used inappropriately; and to understand that foods come from different sources, are necessary for physical growth, and are grouped according to nutritional value. The program is taught in authentic ways involving role playing; analyzing school safety hazards; analyzing and modifying food choices; and tracking and improving one's own hygiene, diet, sleep, interpersonal, and physical behaviors.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Curriculum
2.2 Each local school system has a Board-approved curriculum that supports each child's development.

2.2.10 Physical Education

Physical education provides regular opportunities for each child to explore and develop both gross and fine motor skills, eye-hand and eye-foot coordination, spatial awareness, and tracking abilities.

The physical education program provides children with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to adopt lifelong physically active lifestyles. It is non-competitive and exploratory in nature. It is taught on an individual basis with each child having his or her own piece of equipment. Children are encouraged to select their own challenge levels and to be creative in solving movement problems. Numerous sizes, shapes, speeds, and levels of rigidity of equipment are available to provide appropriate challenge levels and to encourage children to improve themselves in terms of strength and aerobic capacity. Opportunities are provided for using an interval training method that alternates aerobically intense activities with less active skill stations. New challenges are designed to teach locomotor skills, eye-hand and eye-foot coordination, balance, health-related fitness skills, jumping and landing, and the use of personal space. They are designed to develop motor, perceptual, and visual skills as well as vestibular, cardio-respiratory, and muscular systems.

2.2.11 Technology

Multiple opportunities for the use of technology in the classroom are integrated throughout the school day.

Children have access both in classroom and in lab settings to state-of-the-art technology including appropriate software, multimedia, and communication tools. These opportunities enable children to use technology for constructing meaning through the exploration and application of interactive materials reinforcing all curricular content areas. Children work alone and in small groups and make decisions about the appropriateness and quality of information provided through technology. In kindergarten, children are introduced to telecommunications, including e-mail and the internet, to extend student learning beyond the classroom.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Instruction
2.3 Instruction delivers the curriculum through strategies which support each child's development.

2.3.1 Grouping	*2.3.2 Instructional Strategies*	*2.3.3. Questioning/Problem Solving*
Instruction is delivered within large and small groups and in one-on-one interactions. Children are not organized into fixed ability groups or three-group rotations. The daily schedule includes periods for large-group, small-group, and individual work in learning centers. Children are able to choose activities by using procedures which help them to plan their activities in the learning centers. Teachers maintain a record system (e.g., a weekly learning chart) to ensure variety in each child's choice of center. In kindergarten, children plan their activities in teacher-assigned and self-selected learning centers. Basing their decisions on continued observation of children's performance, teachers assign children to small groups with similar or diverse ability levels to work cooperatively on specific projects.	**Instructional delivery includes strategies which promote a thematic, integrated approach to learning and foster children's ability to make connections across learning experiences.** As part of daily instruction, teachers and children develop a conceptual web of a specific theme or topic. The planning process aligns with curricular objectives across content areas with the development and interest of children. Teachers consider related concepts, learn about the subject, gather resources, and involve families. The children's learning experiences include group discussion, fieldwork, representation, investigation, and a display or culminating activity. Teachers structure introduction of the concepts related to the current theme or topic so that children can explore and investigate the theme or topic, reconstruct the teacher-directed learning activity, repeat experiences, practice skills, and experiment with new ways of thinking in the learning centers. Teachers facilitate learning by re-teaching material, basing this re-teaching on documented observation and work samples, which form part of their ongoing assessment of children's strengths and needs.	**Instructional strategies include introducing children to higher level questions and problems which engage children in thinking, communicating, and problem solving.** Children are encouraged to think and communicate by posing and responding to different questions, namely: What *is this called?* (labeling); *What does it do?* (describing); *What did you do in the learning center?* (reconstructing past experiences); *What is another way you could...?* (proposing alternatives); *How are they alike/different?* (making comparisons); *How did you decide to put these things together?* (classifying); *How can we find out how many...?* (enumerating); *What do these words make you think of?* (synthesizing); *Why did you choose to do it this way?* (evaluating); *What would happen if...?* (predicting); *What should we do to make...?* (transforming). Teachers' questions are at varied levels and open-ended. In posing these questions, teachers provide sufficient time for responding. They refrain from interpreting children's responses but encourage children to listen to and elaborate upon the responses of others. Children are encouraged to explore or investigate a question or problem alone, in pairs, or in large groups.

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PROGRAM OPERATION

Instruction
2.3 Instruction delivers the curriculum through strategies which support each child's development

2.3.4 Learning Centers

Learning centers encourage and support children's exploration, experimentation, questioning, and problem solving.

The learning centers are arranged to enable children to engage with materials for the purpose of exploring and investigating the theme or topic. The materials in centers encourage open-ended thinking and active participation alone or in small groups. The learning centers promote literature, manipulatives, art, music, science, block play, and dramatic play. Literature-based centers that reinforce oral language skills, as well as reading and writing skills, are established. Throughout the year, centers are varied to reflect the theme, topic, and/or children's interests (e.g., a farm, beach, repair shop, or space center). Teachers facilitate learning based on their understanding of each child's developmental strengths and needs and use center work time to observe and record children's performance.

2.3.5 Instructional Strategies

Instruction is based upon children's individual needs, interests, strengths, and learning styles.

Teachers align instructional practices, curriculum, and assessment methods for the purpose of facilitating each child's learning. To help children acquire new skills and concepts, teachers select from a range of strategies including: asking open-ended questions, offering cues and prompts, listening attentively to children's responses and giving them enough time to express themselves, demonstrating skills, adding more complex materials or concepts to a learning situation, and providing opportunities for cooperative learning. Teachers provide a relaxed, warm, supportive learning environment which enables children to express their needs, influence the behavior of others, solve problems, describe experiences, impart information, and demonstrate courtesy and empathy towards others. Specific instructional strategies include shared reading, hands-on science, manipulative math, language experience stories, and paired writing. Daily routines require only a minimum of quiet time, provide a familiar context for children, and enable adults to establish positive relationships with children individually.

2.3.6 Instructional Balance

Instructional strategies promote participation by children in teacher-guided and self-initiated activities. Every child is engaged in direct learning daily.

The daily program includes periods for teacher-directed and self-initiated activities. The learning environment is organized so that children can function in it with a minimum of adult direction. Adults model and provide opportunities for children to behave in age-appropriate ways including being playful, assuming responsibility for carrying out routine activities, exhibiting independence and initiative in planning their own learning, and exhibiting helpful behavior. Teacher-directed learning provides sufficient materials or manipulatives so that all children can participate simultaneously. Teacher-directed learning addresses the needs and interests of children in a way that builds on their strengths in all developmental areas.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Instruction
2.3 Instruction delivers the curriculum through strategies which support each child's development.

2.3.7 Authentic Learning	*2.3.8 Multicultural Education/Diversity*	*2.3.9 Instructional Management*	*2.3.10 Social Interaction*
Instruction relates in a meaningful way to children's real life experiences.	**Instruction addresses and respects cultural diversity, learning styles, and other individual differences.**	**Instruction incorporates management strategies which facilitate logical and organized transitions.**	**Instruction promotes appropriate interaction and cooperation.**
Instruction is presented in the context of the child' s world and relates in a meaningful way to children's real-life experiences (e.g., "text-to-life" experiences, "true-to-life" math problems, or "if-then" science problems). Theme-related pictures and signs, functional print, and literacy products developed by children are displayed around the room, the school's hallways, and in the learning centers. Learning centers include real objects and props reflecting the diversity of the children's family backgrounds as well as of the community.	Instructional activities recognize children's cultural identities and learning styles by celebrating cultural events (e.g., Cinco de Mayo and May Day) and home cultures (as represented by, e.g., food and cooking, a family album, and the language spoken at home), by using visuals which depict various cultures authentically, and by involving families as resource people or providers of family artifacts. Instructional strategies include activities which expand awareness of gender roles (e.g., dramatic play area or interviews with working adults). Materials in the arts, literature, and dramatic play area (e.g., dolls, skin-tone paper, books, or music) reflect non-stereotyped gender roles and diverse ethnic groups. Instructional materials also portray positively both individuals with disabilities and persons from a wide range of economic backgrounds.	Active learning dominates the daily routine. Minimal amounts of time are spent getting ready, sitting, and listening. Music, poetry, finger plays, riddles, hand signs, overhead lights, and other forms of language and thinking games or cues are used to eliminate wait time during transitions. The daily routine is maintained to establish set expectations. Sufficient time is allocated for transitions to allow children to clean up and prepare for the next activity. Trays and bins for materials are clearly labeled for children's self-directed clean up. Teachers and other adults in the classroom use techniques that enable children to feel relaxed, to take risks in making comments, and to acknowledge errors or mistakes.	Teachers model and provide opportunities for children to exhibit helpful behavior; to develop and follow rules for the care and safety of themselves, others, and materials; to get along with others from backgrounds that are similar to and different from their own; and to make friends. Social conflicts among children are used as a learning experience, with adults helping children to negotiate disagreements among themselves without solving conflicts for them. Teachers describe consequences of inappropriate and appropriate behavior. Strategies, which might include card games or the enactment of children's stories, help children participate in structured group activities which require one to understand and follow rules.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Assessment

2.4 Assessment of young children is multi-dimensional, developmentally appropriate, and ongoing. Assessment data is used to facilitate learning.

2.4.1 Multiple Assessment Methods	*2.4.2 Documentation*	*2.4.3 Instruction-Based Assessment*
Multiple assessment methods are used to identify children's strengths, needs, and interests and to assess their progress. Teachers implement systematic methods of assessing children's developmental progress using developmental guidelines and checklists. Techniques such as running records, language logs, anecdotal records, and portfolio collection of work samples are used to gain information about each child's interests, strengths, and needs. All of these provide the basis for making instructional decisions. Developmental guidelines and checklists are aligned with the curriculum and instructional practices to support MSDE's Primary Assessment Outcomes and Indicators ("Readiness Outcomes"). Attention is given to assessing progress of non-English-speaking children.	**Information about all areas of the child's development and progress is systematically collected and documented throughout the school year.** Teachers establish techniques for systematic observation and documentation of children's performance (e.g., anecdotal records, developmental checklists, logs, or work samples). Indicators of all developmental domains such as physical and motor development, social and emotional development, language development, cognition and general knowledge, and approaches toward learning are reflected in the developmental checklist. The information on children's performance is collected and organized continually and systematically.	**Assessment is an integral part of daily planning and instruction.** Teachers use observation and work samples of what children are learning to decide on instructional modifications, including what to teach next, to support each child's learning. The focus of the classroom assessment is closely aligned with what the children are learning, and the timing of the assessment corresponds to specific activities during which children are exposed to particular concepts. Weekly plans for instruction include assessment references. Teachers use information from screening instruments or dynamic assessment methods (i.e., instruments used both to support instruction and to identify children for intervention services) when referring children to school-based review and to evaluation teams for the development of intervention strategies or for follow-up formal assessment conducted by the school-based ARD teams (i.e., they follow the local Early Identification and Intervention Program plan). School staff monitors and assesses the effectiveness of the interventions provided as a result of a school-based review and evaluation conducted through the EIIP.

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PROGRAM OPERATION

Assessment

2.5 Assessment of young children is multi-dimensional, developmentally appropriate, and ongoing. Assessment data is used to facilitate learning.

2.4.4 Communication

Assessment data is communicated with families on a regular, ongoing basis.

Teachers schedule at least two parent-teacher conferences per school year and maintain ongoing communication with parents about their children's progress by phone or through notes or journals. Information elicited from families about each child's interests and experiences at home is considered in program planning and implementation. At the end of the school year, parents receive formal evaluations (e.g., a report card) of their children's progress. End-of-year performance is indicated by the level of progress on specific outcomes (i.e., categorical ratings such as "Not Yet Achieved," "Progressing," and "Achieved"). When a child is referred to a school-based review and evaluation team (e.g., the Education Management Team), parents are notified of and included in the review and evaluation procedures. Accommodations are made to facilitate communication with non-English-speaking parents and parents with special needs.

2.4.5 Articulation

Assessment data is shared with parents and relevant teachers in order to communicate progress and to plan for instruction.

Each child's permanent record indicates the type of program (e.g., EEEP, child care, Head Start, or nursery school) in which he or she participated prior to first grade. At the end of the school year, teachers set up articulation meetings with other teachers representing the following grade to discuss children's developmental progress and any ongoing intervention strategies which have been implemented. Teachers arrange for children to visit subsequent grades by the end of the school year.

HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Partnership **3.1 Family and community partnerships support the school's early learning program.**		
3.1.1 Communication **Information about the early learning program is shared with families on an ongoing basis and allows for family input.** The school is engaged in outreach efforts to identify eligible four-year-old children to be enrolled in prekindergarten programs in accordance with the MSDE-approved local plan following the *EEEP Student Selection Criteria and Procedural Guidelines for Determining Eligibility and Selection of Prekindergarten Students*. Outreach activities include articles in newspapers or in the school newsletter, flyers posted in the community, public service announcements, and informational brochures (in various languages, if needed) sent to pediatricians, churches, social services, and health departments. Teachers provide prior contact in the form of confirmation letters and printed information about the program or home visits. Families of kindergarten-eligible students receive information about registration dates. At registration, family members and children tour the school and attend orientation sessions which will provide information about the program and other services related to promoting school readiness.	*3.1.2 Awareness of Child Development* **Families, community members, and teachers collaborate to promote an increased awareness of the stages of child growth and development.** The school provides information about child development and learning in the form of newsletters, brochures, or pages on its Internet website. It offers workshops on topics related to child development and learning. Resource people and experts from the community are invited to share insights about child development and learning with parents and teachers. Information is provided in alternative formats for non-English-speaking parents or in Braille as needed.	*3.1.3 Involvement* **Families, community members, teachers, and administrators are actively involved in school-based activities and decision-making.** The school offers an annual Open House and other family events to promote parental involvement in the education of their children. Parents of young children are encouraged to attend PTA/PTO meetings and become actively involved. Parents are invited to visit the classroom and to participate in other school activities.

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HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Partnership **3.1 Family and community partnerships support the school's early learning program.**		
3.1.4 Evaluation **Family and community members are encouraged to provide input regarding the early learning program.** At least once a year, the principal and the teachers from kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms meet to assess the quality and effectiveness of the program. As part of this review process, family and community members associated with the schools are surveyed or interviewed. The results of evaluations are used to modify and strengthen the program. Prekindergarten programs conduct a self-appraisal every three years by using MSDE's *Standards for Implementing Quality Early Learning Programs*. The self-appraisal team includes a family and/or community member.	*3.1.5 Resource and Referral* **Information and referral for local early childhood education programs and licensed child care facilities in the community are provided to families.** Local school systems work with MSDE to disseminate statewide resource and referral information to schools. The school maintains an updated list of before and after school programs in the community or has information about accessing such information for families. The school disseminates information about its early learning programs to local licensed child care and Head Start programs.	*3.1.6 Collaboration* **Collaboration exists among community agencies, the school, and parent organizations.** The school uses a transition form that enables staff to obtain information about children from their most recent previous early childhood education or early care providers. The transition form is used with parents' permission. The school, with the support of its school system, collaborates with other agencies to provide extended-day or full-day, full-year early childhood and early care arrangements for working families. The school links its prekindergarten and kindergarten programs closely with existing school-based services such as Title I, Even Start, and school-based Head Start programs.

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